

160 SQUADRON, ROYAL AIR FORCE

The Chota Coggage for survivors



SPRING 2002
Number 20

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OBITUARIES:

Sadly we have to report the death of two more of our members; Don Dixon, of Bedlington, Northumberland and Tom Moore, of Hyde, Cheshire. We understand that both had been in ill health for some time and latterly unable to attend reunions. We send our deepest sympathies to both families.

MAKING CONTACT – news, old colleagues and help:

Sergeant Fred Hunter, Flight Engineer. Fred was a member of F/Lt Morley's crew and arrived on the squadron in July or August, 1945, at the same time as our member Tudor Morris. He mostly flew on the numerous mercy missions dropping supplies. His son has been in touch, on his behalf, for information.

"Bulldog 'V' FL 936": It is still cropping up and Ted Daines advises that he now learns that it was not 'Kiwi' Baker (Air Gunner with Dixie Dean) who did the painting – it appears that the painter was Joe Stokes. We are still hoping to hear of a source in UK for obtaining models of this particular Liberator. Jim Jackson obtained his model from a Wal-Mart store in Canada.

RAF Gan: There is a link from Robert Quirk's web site about the 'Gannites' association and a proposed reunion this year. 'D' FL969 even received a few dents there on 11/9/44. whilst 160 was using the Maldives for detachments. The organiser is Alistair Currah, of Salisbury, at Tel: 01722 711181 or by email to alistair@rafgan.co.uk. The web site is at www.rafgan.co.uk.

The site is well worth a visit to read the articles including one of a 28-hour flight by a Catalina on P.R., plus others about the goings-on in much later years.

Thurleigh 306 Bomber Group: Another approach for information for this museum project, this time from Chris Chandler who it seems is also connected to the 379 Bomber Group. He adds fulsome praise and gratitude for all the support given to the US. He is at USA379BG@aol.

Leave on Tea Plantations: Through Tom Kellock we have a copy email from Mrs Anne Winter Williams who has carried out research on PRU's and particularly RAF Benson (perhaps more about this later). She knew of 160's PR work from reading R.C.Nesbit's 'Eyes of the RAF' and coincidentally was herself born in Ceylon. Anne wonders if any 160 personnel did any PR training at Benson, or St Eval, Leuchars or Wick. Regarding Ceylon, she recalls, as a toddler, many 'uncles' who came on leave to her father's tea plantation – ring any bells?

(I enjoyed a few days leave with my basha mate, the sergeant out of the ops room, in 1944, with a planter called Thompson at Horton (?) but he had earlier sent his family to South Africa when there was the threat of invasion. Editor)

S.S.O's and D.R.O's

Diamond Jubilee Reunion 2002. The Falcon Hotel booking has been confirmed and booking forms have been sent to our mailing list. If not received please advise Ted Daines. The dates for your diary are Friday 30/8/02 to Sunday 1/9/02 – book for one two or three nights or just the dinner. There will be a 'piece of cake' – perhaps at least.

Web Sites you should view: Amazing how much there is now on the Internet about Liberators, SEAC, Contacts and of course 160 and other squadrons. Make a point of visiting: -

www.rquirk.com

www.rafgan.co.uk

www.acseac.co.uk

Both Robert Quirk and 'acseac' (Gary Fowkes) have huge amounts of material. The latter is gradually amassing a very large database and on registering for a free password you can access the ORB's of a number of the squadrons including 159 and 160.

Books: More books of interest.

Warbird Tech 1 Series - Cons.B-24 Liberator: Usually £11.95 but only £5.99 from Midland Counties, Tel.01456 254450. Bulk orders at only £3.50 each for 10 – any takers?

The RAF Gan Story – the complete history of this base in the Maldives used in 1944 by 160. £12 from Woodfield Publishing, Bognor Regis. Tel.01243 821234. (See item in 'Making Contact').

Lambs in Blue mentioned last month, now has the imprimatur of our President Bill Cooper. It is the adventures of a couple of Waafs - their lives and loves in Ceylon. Bill has not said if his name cropped up but since he advises that it is a good entertaining read can we assume that he has no cause for concern?

NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

Thurleigh to Ratmalana. Part Nine. "Maybe the last stage of our "Cooks Tour"?"

Our sojourn at Quetta had been quite pleasant, lectures, occasional guard duties, (my duties always seemed to consist of guarding piles of coal), playing football or sports of your choice, swimming at a local pool, playing tricks on the Kite hawks by tying a chunk of bread with a length of string and throwing it as high as possible, then snatch it away just as the hawk made a grab for it. Mind you, those hawks were dead clever and got the bread more times than they missed it.

Our billets at East camp were quite comfortable and White Barracks was even better, but the powers that be came to the conclusion that we had been comfortable for long enough so out came the "Cooks Tour Brochure" and we were on the move once again.

This time the squadron would be split into two sections. One section would be the formation of an advance party to travel to an unknown destination, this to consist of small sections of each trade, engine fitters, riggers, electricians, transport drivers etc; I can't remember the total number of personnel involved but possibly sixty +. The remainder of the squadron, the majority, would proceed elsewhere in India, (this later transpired to be Salbani, (near Calcutta.)

I was one of the individuals detailed for the advance party, with Ron Ryall, Cpl Arthur Evans, Cpl Robert Nichol, Rosie Roberts, Doug Jones, little Ginger Scott a transport driver, Cpl Robbie Roberts and two other transport drivers, one named Jimmy, a Scot and quite a good footballer. The other one's name escapes me, as does the remainder of the party. I hope they will forgive me for my failing memory but it did take place about fifty nine years ago and although I can, like others, remember individual happenings, names always seem to fail me.

Now, on with the journey. Once again, kit packed, very early start, transported to Quetta railway station and loaded onto the train, and we were on our way, the date I believe was November 1st, - I now rely partly on the log kept by Doug Jones; it differs slightly to mine but not by much.

Our first stop was for breakfast at Sibi Junction, and then on to Jacobabad for lunch, I have a photo often of the party, (all corporals I believe, always pulling rank!!) sitting on the steps of the station entrance. Next on to Shikapur in time for supper, here it was necessary to leave the train due to very heavy flooding blocking the line; we slept in a field in the open that night. The next morning, November 2nd at 08-00hrs we loaded our kit and selves onto sampans to cross the floods to Sukkur, a journey of approximately two hours, a very pleasant relaxing episode, crossing the plains through the trees, in the hot sun, with hundreds of parakeets and other birds in constant flight, it was the best part of the Journey. Once unloaded from the sampans we were then taken by lorry to Rhoi Junction, crossing the massive Causeway over the River Indus. Here we were in time to board the 11-30am train to Karachi, we arrived there at 23-00hrs and moved on to Drigh Road and managed to get our heads down for a spell.

The following morning the cooks did us proud with eggs and bacon for breakfast and then a nice piece of fish for tiffin, things were really looking up. We remained at Karachi doing odd jobs when on Saturday the 14th we were told to pack our kit again in preparation to move on. Unfortunately, at this time Ron Ryall passed out unconscious with a very high temperature and I had no option but to get him in to hospital, so he was not with us.

On the following day we were transported to the docks and boarded the "SS Santhia," (our fifth ship) for a journey to Bombay, where we arrived on the 17th. Only a very short stay here before boarding the "City of Paris" (No.6) on which we sailed for Colombo on the 20th and arrived on the 23rd. We were taken direct to Ratmalana Aerodrome and billeted among the coconut trees.

The following morning we were up early and down to the airfield, where we saw what was either a Vildebeeste, or a Wapiti, a Fulmar and other odd aircraft but, alas, still no sign of our aircraft!! We were airmen without aircraft and we were obviously not wanted at Ratmalana so on December 16th were moved out to a jungle station named Vavuniya, up towards the north end of the Island.

Here, once again, we became the odd job men, mostly tree felling. In one instance, working under the supervision of Cpl Robbie Roberts, instead of using axes we tried using explosives to fell one rather large item but sadly did more damage to my hat, which fell from my head as we ran for cover after lighting the fuse, than we did to the tree, so ended up using the axes anyway.

We also had another failure when the station C.O, whose name was Louis, he was either a W/C or a G/C I can't remember which, ordered us to remove a tree that was blocking the light from his office. Our only mistake this time was in judging the direction it would fall. As it happened we judged incorrectly and the tree flattened his office - we left it to Robbie to apologise. Actually the C/O was quite a friendly type, he appeared to be a bit of a gambler. He, and a local Army officer, would bet on anything. Just before Christmas he laid a bet with the Army officer that the RAF boys would wipe the floor with his Army boys in a game of football. The bet was accepted, so Louis immediately dashed off to Colombo to collect some football gear and returned with a hamper packed with a set of eleven shirts, all of various colours, and about twenty pairs of boots consisting of various sizes but about two thirds to fit right feet and the remainder, left.

When the army team turned up we found they were East Africans all about seven feet tall and wearing khaki shorts and damned great army boots. I believe the Japs would have run a mile had they seen them. I am glad I had a sprained ankle at the time so couldn't play, although they could play a reasonable game of football. We had to clear the pitch of stones and empty bottles before kick off - I believe it ended up 0-0.

Also while we were at Vavuniya we received a parcel from "The grateful people of Ceylon for saving them from the Japanese air attack of Easter 1942". We kept them, but I hang my head in shame. I can't recall what we had for Christmas dinner there, we, obviously, were not waited on by officers because we didn't have any, so that is all I can say about our first Christmas overseas.

On the 12th or 13th January, we were honoured with a visit by a Squadron Leader. I wish I could remember his name, but joy upon joy he was a 160 squadron pilot, he said the sooner we could all get down to Ratmalana the better as there were some aircraft there in need of ground crews to look after them.

We immediately packed our kit and sat waiting for orders and on the 16th January we moved back to Ratmalana and there on the airfield stood three beautiful, wonderful white B24 Liberators, "V" FL 936, "H" FL 945 and "S" FL935. It had taken almost exactly a year since 160 was formed at Thurleigh to experience this wonderful moment.

What a journey, Thurleigh, then SS Cuba to Durban, The Nieuw Amsterdam to Kasfareet, Egypt, the HMTS Dunera to Bombay, the SS Rajula to Karachi, by train to Quetta. Then the split, majority to Salbani, near Calcutta, remainder as an advance party back to Karachi, and onto the SS Santhia to Bombay, transfer to the SS City of Paris to Colombo, Ceylon, on to Ratmalana, then to Vavuniya, and after a short while, back to Ratmalana. What other young airmen could boast such an experience, truly a "Cooks Tour" and now it was over, and "TOJO" should start worrying, because the Reformed Far East 160 Squadron, had, at last, become active in this war!!!

(Frank Green with some help from Doug Jones' diaries)



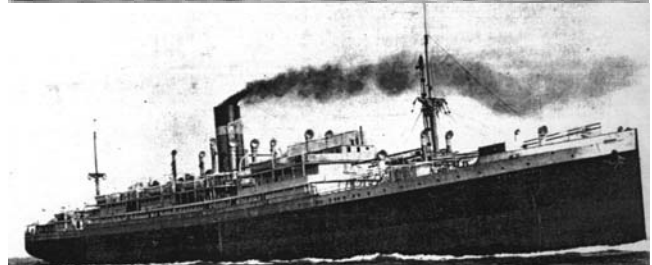
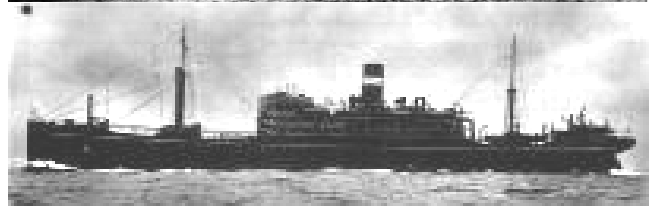
(Journey's end and new beginning – Ratmalana Airfield)



(Well ! we were due a rest – What War? Where's the tea wagon? A bunch of the later knees-browed-types with H FL 945 – Y in the background)

(And these are the ships that took 160 eventually to Ceylon. From the top the CUBA, NIEUW AMSTERDAM, DUNERA [at Karachi in this photo],

RAJULA, ZANTHIA AND CITY OF PARIS- courtesy Trinity Maritime Museum and others Les.Crawley)



MORE MEMORIES OF THE JOURNEY

I wonder how many remember W/C Skinner's speech at the other ranks 1942 Xmas day dinner. About a fortnight later he never returned from operations. Who remembers going into Quetta to see the full length cartoon "Fantasia"? Who was it that got stuck up on the escarpment at East Camp?

Remember the daylight sweeps to remove stones from the so-called parade ground at Kasfareet, there must have been thousands? Did you travel by train anywhere, inside if you had paid, outside if you had not? What about Sweet Water Canal? Rumour had it that soft drinks were made out of it.

I am sure that several of you walked up to Shaftos to watch the film advertised, to have operated the shutters when the notice to do so appeared on the screen. Or, perhaps, the two bottled beers sold in the canteen, one Egyptian the other Australian and much better albeit more expensive, something like 4 ackers for the Egyptian and about 12 ackers for the Australian.

The film "French Without Tears" shown on board the "New Amsterdam" when in the Indian Ocean.

Perhaps when leaving Tewfick on the H.M.T. Dunera, when looking back, - continuous skyline flashing attracted our attention, was it Alamein?

What about the swim in the "Bitter Lakes", or buying a trinket off the Italians P.O.W's? I always remember that they got a lift to the lakes while we, as usual, had to walk.

I noticed that when we arrived off Tewfick, how nice the buildings looked on shore, nice, white and clean, now I know what is meant by an optical illusion. I think sometimes, when at home I put marmalade on my toast, what a different operation it was in Egypt with the ever-present flies, that's if we ever had any bread. All I seem to remember was the dog biscuits.

Then of course there is the appendectomy operation performed by 160's S/Ldr or was it F/Lt Riddell, I know the Cuba steamed a straight line while the convoy zigzagged for about a half hour. Needless to say the operation was a success. I wonder what some of the thoughts were as we fell further and further behind,

though after a while a destroyer did come back for us.

I wonder again what thoughts there were when entering the harbour at Karachi, when a submarine surfaced and followed us in.

Little did we think when entering Karachi, where the River Indus enters the sea, that in a few weeks we would be at Quetta, that is where the source is. I'm sure most of us remember the parades on the platforms for inspections and also for meals on the long haul to Salbani.

Remember, during the 1942 famine when the rice trains stopped overnight at Salbani? we guarded them. We used to prise the doors very slightly ajar and the poor devils used to catch what little ran out in their dhotis while we looked on.

One set never starved. I refer to the ever-present Kite-hawks. On walking to the swill-bins at the cookhouse, we were always relieved of our leavings by these dive-bombing birds; they would swoop over your shoulder and pluck up anything left on your plate.

I remember the camp concerts very well; it was good to see Ron Applegate still performing at reunions. I remember his rendering of "Mandalay"; it sounds such an exotic place; it certainly was not when I was there in early 1945.

I'm sure several of you noticed the earth tremors at Quetta; when i/c guard for a week, we had them every night always just after midnight, and only for a few seconds. On this page I wrote that the Indus rose around Quetta this is of course not true, while from the top of Chiltan one can see the river, its source is of course in Tibet.

While at Durban did you visit Isipingo Beach - even swim in the shark-protected boom? Although invited I declined after seeing the triangular fins moving about outside it: or did you have a look at the Zulu market and beer house? I did but not for long, the smell drove me away. I seem to remember a place in Durban that gave free meals and, if you signed the visitors' book, they wrote to your home to let them know of your safe arrival at Durban. Most will remember the Zulu rickshaw puller, him with the large horned headdress.

(Extracts from Ted Daines' History of 160 Sqdn)

See also the appendix -taken from Quetta ORB's

222 GROUP, CEYLON, A SHORT HISTORY.

(Concluding part).

Meanwhile, 222 Group was planning the opening of the next phase. This meant the attacking of the enemy's own shipping lanes, rather different from a couple of years before when our shipping lanes were ever threatened. So that it could do this, 222 Group was extended so that all general reconnaissance squadrons in the Indian Ocean came directly under its operational control. Although its headquarters remained in Colombo, it had its squadrons operating from Madras, Cuttack, Akyab and, later, Rangoon and the Cocos Islands.

Mine laying was one of the main tasks of the early part of this year. In four months one squadron operating Liberators from Minneriya carried out some of the longest sorties on record to lay nearly a thousand mines in enemy waters off the Malay Peninsular, the Kra Isthmus and the Dutch East Indies. During this period the percentage of success was 86.9, believed to be the highest ever achieved by any squadron employed on this role.

The longest sortie was one of 3,350 miles to Singapore, which involved a flight of over 21 hours, mostly under appalling weather conditions.

At the same time, attacks on enemy shipping in the Andaman Seas and the Straits of Malacca were mounted. In four months, Liberators, operating from both Ceylon and India, sank and damaged some 50 vessels of various sizes. When destroyers of the British East India Fleet attacked and sank an enemy cruiser in the Straits of Malacca, 222 Group Liberators from a station on the Jaffna Peninsular carried out a reconnaissance flight that helped us to maintain contact with the enemy warship during the most critical stage of the operation.

At the time of Rangoon's fall, the joint efforts of the British East India Fleet and 222 Group had virtually cleared enemy vessels from the seas west of the Malay Peninsular.

Then the strike aircraft looked further east. Kra Isthmus, 222 Group Sunderlands, now operating from Rangoon, began to reconnoitre the Gulf of Siam. They found a multitude of small vessels; coasters, frigates and so on, and immediately began wreaking destruction amongst them. Before the end of June they had sent down 88 tons of small craft.

Quite Small.

The vessels attacked by these Sunderlands were quite small as ships go but, more than any other nation, the Japanese placed great value on their little ships. A cargo of 100 tons of foodstuffs was reckoned as sufficient to keep a division of 18000 men in field for six days. Every cargo that went to the bottom

of the Gulf of Siam was an irreplaceable loss to men still holding out in Burma or attempting to force a way over the mountains into Siam and Indo-China.

Sunderlands from Rangoon were still attacking, and sinking, Jap vessels off the Kra Isthmus when the final cease operations order came through. At the same time, Liberators flown by a squadron of the Royal Netherlands Naval Air Service, which had been with 222 Group since 1942, were operating from their new base on the Cocos Islands.

There has been another aspect of 222 Group's work from which the veil of secrecy has only just been lifted. It is now known that a great guerrilla army, trained in secret by hundreds of British officers and NCO's who had arrived in Malaya either by submarine or had been parachuted from long range Liberators, was on the point of striking when the Japanese surrendered. Right from December of last year this guerrilla army has been built up as the Liberators, flying sorties of 3000 miles, dropped more men, more arms and equipment. In some places air drops were so difficult that they could only be done by daylight. At the end of July operations were in full swing and Liberators flew from Ceylon's jungles daily with reinforcements. To increase their range, all armaments except the rear turret were removed. The longest sortie was one of over 4000 miles and occupied more than 24 hours.

The end of the war came quickly. Ceylon's Liberators were quickly transformed into 'mercy' aircraft. Within three weeks they had dropped over 280,000 lbs of Red Cross parcels and medical supplies to allied prisoners of war in Malaya, Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. In addition ninety-five doctors, medical orderlies, administrators and others were dropped by parachute. Sunderlands were stripped of armament and turned into flying hospital ships. Every day they crossed 1666 miles of water between Ceylon and Singapore as they went to and fro for their loads of sick prisoners of war. 222 Group's last flights were missions of mercy. They added a final chapter to the story of work done here in Ceylon.

What has been the keynote of this story? I would without hesitation use the word 'distance'. From the day when Catalinas from Koggala set out to bomb targets at Sabang and execute the longest bombing raids of the war to that time, right until the final mercy missions over southern Sumatra and Java, 222 Group's aircraft have been on conquering distance. Because they have succeeded, Ceylon has remained the headquarters of operations over the largest battle arena of war, two and a half million square miles of Indian Ocean.

Written by an RAF officer. From the Ceylon Times, Friday Evening November 2nd, 1945. per Frank Green

Of Unit or Formation No. 160 Squadron

PLACE	DATE	TIME	SUMMARY OF EVENTS	Reference to Appendix
Karachi	30.5.42		Squadron disembarked M T Rajula, ex Bombay ex Middle East ex UK. Personnel comprised as follows: - F.O. A/F/. L.C.W.Hunter (adjutant and Acting C.O.) F.L. A.G.Riddell (M.O.). P.O. W.H.Crosling (C & C), P.O. L.G. Coombe (Sigs), P.O. J.Macdonald (C & C), F.O. O.B.E.Morgan (Intel) P.O. S.Poole (Eqpt). 2.W.O's, 12 Senior NCO's, 504 Cpls and AC's (all ground crew). Squadron proceeded to the Army Transit Camp, Karachi, and was accommodated under canvas pending movement to RAF Reception Centre, Drigh Road.	
Reception Centre Drigh Road	4.6.42		Squadron proceeded by transport from Karachi – accommodated under canvas.	
"	5.6.42		Majority of airmen commenced full employment by No.301 M.U.	
"	6.6.42		All airmen of wireless trades detached A. R. C. for duty.	
"	7.6.42		P.O's W.H.Crosling (C & C), J.Macdonald (C & C) and L.G.Coombe (Sigs) commenced full employment by Cypher Section No.301 M.U.	
"	11.6.42		H.R.H. The Duke Of Gloucester visited Drigh Road and inspected all personnel of No.160 Squadron.	
"	16.6.42	02.00	Squadron departed R.C.Drigh Road by rail en route R.C.Quetta. P.O's W.H.Crosling (C & C), J.Macdonald (C & C),L.G.Coombe (Sigs) And all airmen of wireless trades attached to R.C.Drigh Road.	
Reception Centre Quetta	17.6.42	12.00	Squadron (less detachments) arrived R.C.Quetta and accommodated in bungalows at East Camp, Quetta.	
"	19.6.42		Training syllabus for all personnel commenced (P.T.,Drill, Route Marches, etc.). Lectures for tradesmen commenced.	
"	20.6.42		Training and lectures commenced.	
	To	30.6.42		

Flight Lieutenant , Commanding
No. 160 Sqadron



(Just a few of the Quetta bods. No mistaking 'Taff' Morgan.... wonder if he still uses Brylcreem? And was this really what they looked like after one of those Quetta route marches? – And was it pre knee-browning?)